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NEWS AROUND THE CLOCKphilly.com

HARASSMENT ALLEGATIONS

Ex-staffers say Leach's actions crossed line



Sen. Daylin Leach (D., Montco). STEVEN M. FALK / Staff

Inappropriate touching, offensive talk alleged. Senator denies misconduct, blames opponent.

By David Gambacorta and Angela Coulombis
STAFF WRITERS

On a bitterly cold night in February 2016, a woman named Emily met State Sen. Daylin Leach at a political fundraiser in Harrisburg. She was 27, working as a temporary employee for the Pennsylvania Senate Democratic Campaign Committee. He was a 55-year-old incumbent who chaired the committee.

Leach, a well-known Montgomery County progressive and longtime advocate for women's rights, listened with interest as they talked, Emily said. At one point, she explained that she had once lived in Beirut and could speak Arabic.

“It is true that sometimes I do touch people when I talk to them. A clasped forearm, a pat on the back. But never anything inappropriate or sexual.”

State Sen. Daylin Leach, in response to the allegations

She recalled that during the conversation Leach held on to her upper arm “for an uncomfortable amount of time,” maybe 10 seconds or so. It seemed harmless, but later that evening, an email from Leach arrived in her inbox.

“Hey there,” read the subject line. Below was a short passage written in Arabic. “How wonderful it was to talk to you today,” it began, according to a translation, before making a reference to some petitions.

See **LEACH** on A15

Pennsylvania's vast forestlands are imperiled as their aging private owners divide and sell.

THREATENED BY A THOUSAND CUTS

INQUIRER SPECIAL REPORT



By Jason Nark
STAFF WRITER

Many trees in Gary Hague's Wyoming County forest sprouted before he was born. Others were planted with his own rough hands. A memory seeded in the summer twilight a half-century ago grows there, too.

The deed says 99 acres “more or less,” but it felt even bigger when Hague was 14 and his Uncle George said they needed to walk it. They left the clapboard farmhouse at dusk, mostly silent aside from waking insects, and followed the boundary lines in the long shadows.

When George Hague died in 1973, an attorney told his nephew the land was his.

“I think he drew up his will that night after our walk,” Gary Hague, 65, said from his kitchen table in the rancher that replaced the farmhouse. “I think he was trying to show me what stewardship was, that this is family, part of who we are.”

He looked out the window at his inheritance. “Sorry if I get a little emotional about it,” he said. “When I was younger, I didn't get emotional, but the older I get, the more I feel.”

With about 58 percent of its 28.6 million acres covered in forest, Pennsylvania still honors its namesake, “Penn's Woods,” as one of the more heavily wooded states in the country. The largest forests are several

See **FORESTS** on A16

Sue Benedict at Beartown, the 2,000-acre forest she inherited near State College. While some forest owners divide and sell, Benedict is planning to pass Beartown along to her three sons.

JESSICA GRIFFIN / Staff Photographer

LOSERS AND WINNERS

Are your property taxes all wrong?

Incorrect assessments mean thousands overpay, boosting others in area who underpay.

By Laura McCrystal and Michaelle Bond
STAFF WRITERS

The house on Massachusetts Avenue in Upper Darby had been sitting on the market for a while when Tim Miles and his wife bought it for \$185,000 last year.

Miles said the Realtor told him why other prospective buyers had been wary: “The taxes were really high,” said Miles, 28, a lawyer. “And I think that's probably why they weren't able to sell as quickly.”

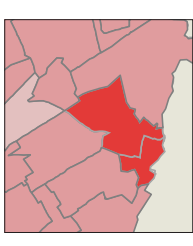
The annual bill for the two-story house on a sixth of an acre was more than \$10,500. The township has some of the region's highest taxes, but Miles' property levy was thousands of dollars higher than even those on comparably priced homes in the township.

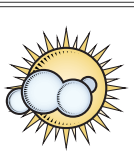
The reason: The county estimate of the home's worth — the “assessment” on which the tax bill is based — was too high.

Inaccurate assessments — primarily the result of varying rates of property appreciation — are common throughout Pennsylvania.

Why? Years or decades pass between countywide reassessments, leaving many property owners to pay more than their fair share — or less. Delaware County's are so out of whack that a judge has ordered the county to revalue all its properties.

See **PROPERTY TAXES** on A19





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INAUGURATION DAY ANGER

D.C. protest could send 2 from Phila. to prison

By Jonathan Tamari
WASHINGTON BUREAU

WASHINGTON — They called the event “Disrupt J20.”

The idea, one organizer said weeks in advance, was to take to the streets hours before President Trump's Jan. 20 inauguration and turn downtown Washington into chaos.

Publicly, it was billed as an antifascist, anticapitalist march. About 500 people gathered that morning blocks from the

White House. A handful came from Philadelphia, including Jennifer Armento, 38, and Oliver Harris, 28.

Most wore black. Many covered their faces and had helmets or goggles. Some carried signs opposing Trump, racism, and a peaceful transition of power.

Chaos came quickly.

Wielding hammers and crowbars, some shattered windows, threw newspaper boxes and trash cans into the streets and hurled rocks and broken pieces of side-

walk at officers.

Eleven months later, Armento and Harris are among the first six people on trial for that morning's events. Jury deliberations began Friday. Each faces felony charges — although none are accused of any specific acts of violence.

In fact, for them and most of the 188 others awaiting trial, prosecutors acknowledge they have no evidence the defendants personally destroyed any property, or signs

See **PROTEST** on A6

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